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ABSTRACT

Based upon the hypothesis that a person's behavior is dictated by the immediate environment, a study was conducted to investigate whether student's perception of their best liked and least liked subjects was affected by their teacher's perception of the subjects they liked to teach best and felt most knowledgeable about. Participants, 47 third grade teachers and their 984 students, received color-coded attitude surveys, each color representing a subject taught. Students were asked to rank the subjects they liked best and rank the subjects they believed their teachers best liked teaching; teachers were asked to rank the subjects they felt they had the greatest knowledge in, the subjects they felt they taught best, and the subjects they preferred to teach. Results, tabulated for congruence between student and teacher responses, showed that both teachers and students preferred mathematics and reading over other subjects. They differed in their preference for language arts and social studies, teachers preferring the former, students the latter. No cause and effect relationship was established for student behavior or academic success, but a number of questions for future research, such as how teachers communicate their preferences to students, were posed. (Four tables, a discussion, and reference list are included.) (JC)

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THE CONGRUENCE OF TEACHER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING ACTIVITY

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TEACHER STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

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THE CONGRUENCE OF TEACHER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING ACTIVITY

The perceptual view of human behavior holds that behavior of an individual is a function of his ways of perceiving. How a person behaves at a given moment is a direct expression of the way things seem to him at that moment. Combs (1982), reported people do not behave according to the "facts" as they seem to an outsider, they behave as a result of how things seem to them. If a student believes, for example, that a teacher is unfair or biased or doesn't like reading it matters very little whether the teacher holds those views or not. The child will behave as if the teacher does because that is how things seem to him at that moment. Lamy (1965) suggested a positive relationship between a student's perception of self and the school related variables such as academic achievement and achievement motivation. Ford (1985) suggested how a child perceives school and teachers will have some bearing not only on how well he/she performs academically but upon his perception of teacher performance as well. It was found that urban junior high school students who were high in teacher affiliation, that is liked their teachers and saw them as helpful, attentive, and understanding, also felt that most of their teachers found their subject matter stimulating and enjoyed the process of communicating this material to students.

Teachers, too behave in terms of what seems to them important. Brophy and Good (1974), Cooper (1976), Good, Cooper and Blakey (1980) agree selection of content, method and materials will be made in terms of how each as an individual perceives their role and purpose in the teaching-learning process. The present study is an initial attempt at exploring the congruence of teacher and student perceptions of classroom teaching activity. The following research questions were asked:

1. In a given set of classrooms what subject do teachers perceive they have the most knowledge for teaching?
2. In a given set of classrooms what subjects do teachers feel they teach best?
3. In a given set of classrooms what subjects do teachers feel they prefer teaching best?
4. What subjects do children in those same classrooms enjoy studying most?
5. What subjects do children in those same classrooms feel the teacher enjoys teaching most?

Method

Sample

The subjects were 47 third grade techers and their 984 third grade students. Each teacher taught in a self contained

classroom in a suburban community in a metropolitan area in Oklahoma.

Procedures

Administering and Data Collection

Elementary school principals were each given a packet containing Teacher Attitude Survey and Student Attitude Survey. Both of these surveys were color coded, the same color for each teacher and her students. Each color presented a rotating rank order of subjects taught: language arts, math, reading, science and social science. There were the same number of questionnaires in rank order with each color. Every teacher and her students had a different color of questionnairs in their building. Principals were asked that when they collected the questionnaires, to get the blues from a teacher and her students, then the reds from a teacher and her students until all surveys were collected. The researcher collected the survey packets from the elementary school principals.

Student Attitude Survey

The student's survey asked two questions: Please rank the following subjects as you like them best; Please rank the following subjects you feel your teacher likes best. The five subjects were listed Language Arts, Math, Reading, Science, and Social Science and five blank spaces with each question for the students to complete. The student ranked all five subjects from best liked to least liked.

Teacher Attitude Survey

The teacher survey had three questions: Please rank the following subjects in which you feel you have the greatest knowledge; Please rank the following subjects you feel you teach best; Please rank the following subjects in the order of your teaching perference. The five subjects were listed Language Arts, Math, Reading, Science, and Social Science and five blank spaces with each question for teacher to complete. The teachers ranked all five subjects from best to least.

Data Analysis

Teacher Attitude Survey rankings and Student Attitude Survey ranking were tabulated to examine what if any, congruence might exist between teacher and student attitude. Comparisons were make between distance of ranking with a possible score of 0 [agreement], 1, 2, 3, and 4 [greatest disagreement]. Independent t-test were administered for comparison.

RESULTS

Third grade teachers studied reported their knowledge in teaching in order of reading highest then, math, language arts, social studies and science. (see Table 1) Note the lower the mean score the greater the agreement. Teachers appear to be saying "they are best prepared to teach in reading, then, math, language arts, social studies and science."

Table 1

Mean Scores of Teachers Perception of Knowledge in Teaching

Knowledge in Teaching	Mean
Reading	1.15
Math	1.28
Language Arts	1.72
Social Studies	2.62
Science	3.23

Table 2

Mean Scores of Teacher Perception of Best Taught Subject

Best Taught Subject	Mean
Math	1.06
Reading	1.34
Language Arts	1.68
Social Studies	2.78
Science	3.17

Table 3

Mean Scores of Teachers Perception of Preference in Teaching

Preference in Teaching	Mean
Math	1.11
Reading	1.68
Language Arts	1.91
Social Studies	2.36
Science	3.17

When teachers were asked to evaluate the subjects they taught best they identified math highest, reading, language arts, social studies and science. (see Table 2) While math and reading reversed positions there was no significant difference between these two areas when comparing teacher knowledge vs teacher effectiveness. Teachers appear to be saying "I teach best that which I know best."

In an attempt to determine the extent to which a preference of teaching exists teachers who were studied reported mathematics followed by reading, language arts, social studies and science. (see Table 3) The teachers in this study seem to be saying they

prefer teaching those subjects they taught best, they knew most about, and in which they had the greatest training.

The third grade students studied evaluated the subjects they like best and the subjects their teachers liked best. When the scores were compared between subject best liked by student and subject best liked by teachers there was no significant agreement. (see Table 4) Reading was close in agreement, however, not significant. Tied for least agreement were the subjects of language arts and science. From student perception it appears the students best liked subject is different from their teachers best liked subject.

Table 4

Student Perception of Their Best Liked Subject and Teachers Best Liked Subject

	mean	t	pt
Reading	.03	10.22	n. s.
Math	.10	1.60	n. s.
Social Studies	.11	0.49	n. s.
Language Arts	.57	10.62	n. s.
Science	.57	2.38	n. s.

DISCUSSION

A transactional view holds that at any given moment a child or a person is engaged with another person or event, both exist only in terms of each other, and behavior cannot be understood apart from the situation in which is occurs. In the class room a teachers behavior is modified by his moment-to-moment dealings with his pupils just as their behavior is only understood in relation to his. This requires of teachers several types of knowledge. Since people behave according to how things seem to them, effective teaching must take into account not only general principles of learning but also an awareness of how students perceive the teaching/learning process. More is known about the teachers role in promoting cognitive than affective development. Little has been learned about classroom practice and affective growth of students because there have been few attempts to study these two classes of variables simultaneously. This initial attempt at exploring the congruence of teacher and student perception of classroom teaching activity is only a beginning.

Results of this study would indicte that by and large teachers prefer to teach those subjects in which they have the greatest preparation, the greatest knowledge, and the greatest feelings of success. They teach best that which they know best. The subject areas most often meeting these criteria were mathematics and reading; those least often meeting them were social studies and science.

Students perceptions of their best and least liked subjects would seem to mirror those expressed by their teachers. Reading and mathematics were highest on their preference list; science was lowest. The only area in which teacher and student preferences for subject matter differed was social studies. Children preferred social studies to language arts while teachers express an opposite view.

Although it is interesting that teacher and student subject preferences seem to mirror each other, this study was not able to statistically establish a cause-effect relationship. It did, however, raise several interesting questions for conjecture and future study. Is there a relationship between student preference for school subjects and academic achievement? Is there a relationship between student perception of their teacher's best liked subject and academic achievement? Is there greater agreement among student perception of their teachers best liked subject with students who are successful in that subject than among students who are not successful in it? In what ways to teachers telegraph their subject area attitudes and preferences to students? Or do they at all? Do teachers through their verbal/non-verbal behavior communicate their lack of preference for science or their strong preferences for reading and mathematics. More importantly, does it make a difference to learners?

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